Concept of Sea Basing and its Effect on Indo -US Relations: The Way Ahead

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Subject Area National Military Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Concept of Sea Basing and its Effect on Indo -US Relations: The Way Ahead

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Thesis: The concept of sea basing and the continuing interest of the United States in the Indian Ocean will result in increased US Naval activity in the Indian Ocean. In order to avoid unpleasant incidents at sea that may adversely affect the relationship between the two countries, the US Navy and the Indian Navy must have mutual trust and respect for each other.

Discussion: The concept of sea basing is in the developmental stage. The sea base is likely to include various types of ships, aircraft and platforms currently under development. The sea base will be forward deployed in various regions of the world and will give the US the capability to rapidly deploy its forces in any region of the world.

            Given the continuing interest of the US in the Indian Ocean, this region is likely to be a location for sea base. Since both India and US are interested in developing a closer relation with each other, a positive interaction between the navies would be desired and expected. The expansion of Indian Navy's power projection capability and US Navy's sea basing in the Indian Ocean may result in interference between the two navies due to the proximity of their operation if the two navies do not trust each other.

Recommendation: Greater interaction will lead to building trust and respect between the US and Indian navies. The current annual exercises between the two navies are a means to building mutual trust and confidence. The exercises should lead to greater interoperability between the navies. Intelligence sharing and exchange, combined SLOC protection and agreements for avoidance of Incidents at Sea are some other steps to achieve the aim. This is the right time for both the navies to build an association in tandem with the strategic relationship between the two countries.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Number	**Page**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

CONCEPT OF SEA BASING AND ITS EFFECT ON

INDO - US NAVAL RELATIONS: THE WAY AHEAD

We are the *two* largest democracies, committed to political freedom protected by representative government. …Through a strong partnership with India, we can best address any differences and shape a dynamic future.

US National Security Strategy, September 2002

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEA POWER

Sea Power has had a great impact on world history since ancient times. This has been *illustrated by R Adm Alfred T Mahan in his basic work,* " *The Influence of Sea Power upon* History" with the example of the war between Rome and Carthage[1]. The dominance of Athens over the rest of the Greek world was a result of their naval prowess. The decline of this empire towards the end of the Peloponnesian War was a result of the increase in the naval strength of their opponents – the Spartans. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the decline of Spain's power was again a consequence of the decline of its naval strength while the supremacy of the British at sea led them to claim, "The Sun never sets on the British Empire". On the same note, although the industrial strength of the United States contributed to the allies winning both the World Wars, the effect its sea power had, cannot be neglected. American sea power cooperated in the defeat of the submarine threat in both the wars as also the defeat of Japan in the Pacific Theater. To that extent, the rise of

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[1] AT Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1600 -1783*, Dover ed. (New York: Dover Publication, 1987), iv-v.

the United States as a superpower may be attributed to sea power. Sea power may be

defined as the use of a navy to gain strategic leverage over an opponent.[2]

In today's world, the United States enjoys the distinction of being the world's sole

superpower. Her industrial and technological might is unchallenged and she is far ahead of

any of her competitors. This superiority also translates to her armed forces. The US Navy is

the largest in the world today and has the capability to project power across any region of

the world. In keeping with its desire to remain ahead of the competition and its strategic

imperatives, the US Navy – Marine Corps team has introduced the concept of Sea basing.[3]

But naval forces all over the world carry out sea basing to a certain degree when they

deploy their ships across the oceans for long duration. The question regarding the exact

connotation of the new concept of Sea basing thus arises.

Impact of Sea Power

Naval forces are able to influence events in a manner distinct from land forces. It

was Commodore Mathew Calbraith Perry of the US Navy who led a flotilla of naval ships

into Tokugawa, Japan in 1853, demanded that Japan open herself for trading and secured

that right. Since the oceans constitute about 3/4th of the worlds surface, navies of the world

are capable of using them as bridges to visit distant lands while simultaneously having the

power to prevent conflicts and control crises. Thus, normal peacetime activities of navies

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[2]"Leverage of Sea Power", USMC CSC *Elective Syllabus and Reader*, n.p., n.d., 3.

[3] The concept of sea basing envisages using a number of platforms based at sea to project offensive and defensive combat power from the sea. This concept is discussed in detail later in the paper.

can and do influence the countries in the regions where they operate. The US Navy, by virtue of being the most powerful navy in the world, has the potential to exert a far greater impact than any other navy. The sea base will provide it a capability that surpasses the sum of its parts.[4] Therefore, it is necessary to study how the concept of sea basing will affect other parts of the world.

Indian Ocean – Where the US and Indian Navies will Meet

The Indian Ocean is called so because of the domination of its northern part by the Indian peninsula. The interest shown by extra-regional powers in this ocean since historical times is unlikely to reduce in the near future. Apart from the oil in the Persian Gulf and its shipment to Japan, South East Asia and China, the environment of instability and growing religious fundamentalism will ensure continued US interest in the Indian Ocean. The growth of Chinese and other Asian economies will also contribute significantly to US interest in the Indian Ocean. Sea basing will provide the means by which the US Navy will be able to project power in order to influence events and interfere if required in the littoral area of the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, India is predicted to achieve great power status and its navy likely to improve its power projection capability. This implies that the Indian Ocean and the seas around it are likely to be the operating area of two big navies. Prima facie, India and US have different interests in this region – India is interested in defending its sea borne trade against Pakistan in case of war while the US is concerned about the oil

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[4] Col Art Corbett and Col Vince Goulding, "Sea basing: What's New?", *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, November 2002, 34 - 39.

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rich region of the Persian Gulf. Thus, the future of the Indian Ocean region becomes fascinating to a student of this region.

PURPOSE OF THESIS

This thesis examines the emerging concept of sea basing, the structure it is likely to take and its effects. It is divided into two parts. In the first part, it will examine the concept in its present form and explore the direction that the concept is taking towards fruition. This will help to better understand its likely implications, which will be the focus in the second part. The second part will then discuss the various possible effects of the concept on relations between India and the US in context of the emerging strategic relationship between the two countries. Finally, it makes a prognosis of the possible impact of this concept on the relationship especially between the navies of the two countries and recommends the way ahead.

Part One

S E A   B A S I N G

CONCEPT OF SEA BASING

Development of the Concept

The desire of the United States to have equipment readily available for deployment in possible conflict areas around the globe, coupled with realization that existence of a friendly port in theater to offload the equipment cannot be guaranteed led to the current concept of Sea Basing.[5] An offshoot of the US strategy of power projection, this concept was conceived in the 1970s and has evolved over the years to be finally included by the CNO as the third leg of the triad in his outline for the US Navy in the 21st century.[6] However, naval history indicates that the concept of sea basing is not new per se; in its present form, it appears to be mutating to cater to the requirements of the 21st century.

Historical Sea Basing

The dependence of navies on land for their sustainment at sea is a phenomenon as old as the navies themselves. Apart from the intangible factor of sailors' will to stay at sea, the duration depended to a large degree upon the quantity of provisions that a ship could

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[5] "The New Priority of the USN – Sea Basing," *AMI International Commentary,* online edition, URL: <http://www.amiinter.com/seabasing.html >, accessed 25 February 04.

[6] It may be argued that the 1990 White Paper of the US Air Force "Global Reach, Global Power" gave a fresh impetus to the concept of sea basing by suggesting that air power supplemented by overseas bases was sufficient to project power anywhere in the world. This led the US Navy to counter it with the concept of sea basing.

carry or find at sea. During the days of the sail that extended for almost a thousand years, these two factors primarily determined the number of days that a ship could remain at sea without touching a port. As the sailing ship gave way to the steam ships with the screw propeller, one more factor was added – the availability of coal! This development resulted in the Mahanian importance of bases in different parts of the world for a country that wanted to be a successful sea power.

The success of the US Navy in learning to sustain itself at sea and its ability to project power from the sea has been a major factor in US victories from World War II till the present. In the Pacific Theater, it was the fleet trains that were able to provide the required logistics support to successfully implement the plan to win the campaign. Again during the Vietnam War, the bombing campaign was to a certain degree, sustained from the sea.[7] Thus, we see that the concept of sea basing is not a new concept per se. Apart from the familiar examples of sea basing for tactical air power, strategic nuclear deterrence and marine amphibious operations, history contains various other examples of sea basing. As brought out by Commander Paul Nagy, USNR in *Proceedings* of November 2002, these include sea based underway replenishment, maintenance support, pre-positioning, continental defense and command and control.[8] Hence, it is necessary to discuss the form of sea basing, as it existed earlier in order to contrast it with the present concept.

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[7] Operation Rolling Thunder began in 1965 but aircraft from US Navy's carriers hit North Vietnam in August 1964. The launch of 46 planes from USS Constellation and USS Ranger on 29 June 1966 to strike oil storage plants on the outskirts of Hanoi and Haiphong began the campaign to cripple the North Vietnamese petroleum and oil storage and distribution system. Carrier based support to the Vietnam War continued till the end when they were used for evacuation of civilians in 1975.

[8] Commander Paul Nagy, USNR, "The History of Sea Basing", *US Naval Institute Proceedings,* November 2002, 36-38.

During World War II, the campaign in the Pacific Theater was sustained by logistics from the sea. The vast distances between Hawaii, the main US base in the Pacific, from the American mainland and the islands that were subsequently recaptured from the Japanese necessitated the supply of men, materiel, fuel, ammunition and other supplies to sustain the forces. This was achieved through merchant ships that continuously brought the goods through the Sea-Lanes of Communication. More importantly, the fleet had to be sustained at sea for long periods to be effective against the Japanese. Logistics ships that followed the fleet and regularly supplied the needed items carried out this task. As Ronald Spector has brought out, the mobile logistical fleet comprising supply ships, oil tankers, ammunition ships, hospital ships, tugs, floating dry docks, lighters and cranes that followed the fast carriers of TF 58 throughout the Central Pacific greatly enhanced the sustainability of TF 58.[9]

Despite the fact that a large number of amphibious landings were carried out in the Pacific Theater, direct fire power support from the sea was limited to bombardment by naval ships and aircraft before and during the landings. Once a beachhead was established, the supplies required by the landing force were shifted ashore. This led to the sea base being regarded largely as a logistics delivery capability.[10] Ultimately, this form of sea basing was able to sustain the fleet at sea for a longer period than ever since the days of the sail and support amphibious operations ashore through underway replenishment.[11]

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[9] Ronald Spector, *At War, At Sea*, (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc, 2001), 276 – 277.

[10] "Defense Science Board Task Force on Sea Basing Report", 38

[11] Spector, 277.

During the period from the Second World War through the Vietnam War, the sea provided virtually everything the Army took into combat or fired at the enemies of the United States.[12] The successful landing at Inchon during the Korean War and the use of naval aircraft during the Korean War and Vietnam War both owed their success to sea basing as it existed then.

During World War II, the US Navy, heralding the sea basing of Command and Control, converted 17 merchant hulls to amphibious force command ships. The Cold War saw destroyer escort and liberty ships carrying out radar picket duties off the US coast to provide early warning of long-range Soviet bombers. Afloat pre-positioning by the US started in the early 1980s and provided support to not only the Navy and the Marine Corps, but also to the Army, Air Force and the Defense Logistics Agency. The period after the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 saw the validation of this concept when two squadrons of the Military Sealift Command sailed to Saudi Arabia with Marine Corps equipment.[13]

Why Sea Basing?

In order to understand what is meant by sea basing in the present context, it is necessary to discuss the reasons that have led to a renewed interest in it. Strategic documents such as Joint Vision 2020 (JV 2020) and Defense Planning Guidance led to the development of operating concepts such as Sea Power 21, Marine Corps Strategy 21 and

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[12] Williamson Murray, "Thoughts on Sea Basing in the Twenty – First Century", Appendix D to "DSB Task Force on Sea Basing Report."

[13] Nagy, 36-38.

Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare. Different Concept of Operations (CONOPS) such as Sea to Objective Maneuver (STOM), Maritime Prepositioning Force (Future) (MPF(F)) and Sea Basing flow from the operational concepts as a means of converting the vision outlined in the various documents into reality. Sea basing flows directly from Sea Power 21as the third leg of the triad designed to ensure the continuing operational effectiveness of the Navy. However, the genesis of the present concept of sea basing can be traced to the dependence on power projection and forward presence as naval strategy, the problem of "anti access", the concept of Operational Maneuver From the Sea (OMFTS) and Naval Expeditionary Force and the overarching need for logistical sustainment. A brief review of these terms follows.

Forward Presence and Power Projection

The change in the global power equations following the Second World War led to the US adopting power projection as one of the mainstays of its naval strategy. The imperatives of the Cold War made it necessary for the US to have a global focus. Consequently, the US Navy developed its blue water capability. The end of the Cold War has changed the focus from global threat to regional challenges and a shift from open ocean warfighting to power projection especially in the littorals. Power projection is the ability to rapidly and effectively deploy and sustain US military power in and from multiple, dispersed locations until conflict resolution.[14] Apart from power projection, the other keystone missions of the US Navy are sea control, strategic deterrence, strategic sealift and

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[14] "US National Military Strategy, 1997".

forward presence.[15] Power projection and forward presence complement each other and provide options to the country's leaders to deal with potential crises. They also help shape the perceptions of allies and potential adversaries regarding the capabilities of the US. The reduction in the defense expenditure following the end of the Cold War and the hostility of the local population in a few countries has had the effect of the US being forced to reduce its overseas land bases. The armed forces have therefore been forced to change their strategy from forward basing to forward presence and this shift has led to an increased reliance on sea basing.

Anti - Access and Area Denial

Over the years, the US has paid a high price at crucial times for depending on other nations to gain access to its areas of interest. The Turkish denial of access for the 4th Infantry Division during Operation Iraqi Freedom was only the latest in the long list of such instances. The list includes its NATO allies in 1973 during Yom Kippur War, France and Spain in 1986 during attacks on Libya, and Saudi Arabia on three different occasions from 1996 to 1998.[16] Sea basing is seen as a partial antidote to the problem of anti-access. Since naval ships retain their sovereignty even on the high seas, it provides a powerful argument that the US will not be fettered by a third country in its ability to act against its adversary. The following comment made by a senior naval officer in 1996 typifies this line of thinking. "With an aircraft carrier, you get 4.5 acres of Americana with no diplomatic

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[15] Admiral Vern Clark, USN, "Projecting Decisive Joint Capabilities", *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, October 2002,32- 41.

[16] Murray, 115-116.

restrictions on when and what you can fly."[17] The increased attention demanded by the

littoral states in the post-Cold War world with the concomitant accessibility of littorals

through the seas has given an impetus to the concept of sea basing. However, this concept

may also be seen as the naval rebuttal of the Air Force's White Paper of "Global Reach,

Global Power" in which B-2 bombers were considered to be adequate to police the world

using airfields provided by friendly nations. The availability of sea based forces and

logistical support lessens the need for and reliance on foreign access, thereby minimizing

the strategic impact when access is denied in the midst of crisis.[18]

OMFTS

The operational concept of Operational Maneuver From the Sea (OMFTS) was

introduced in December 1995. This concept was aptly described by the then Commandant

of the Marine Corps, Gen. Charles C Krulak as, "marriage between maneuver and naval

warfare".[19] The distinguishing feature of OMFTS is the use of sea as both maneuver space

and as a protected base. This operating concept and its supporting CONOPS of STOM

reduce the reliance on shifting the logistical tail ashore. It uses the idea of operational

mobility of naval power to launch an attack at the chosen time and place to decisively

exploit an enemy weakness. OMFTS envisions making the beach transparent to

amphibious warfare through STOM. It thus reduces the reliance on the ability to protect the

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[17] Christopher J Bowie, "The Anti-Access Threat and Theater Air Bases", Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2002, 3, originally quoted in Williamson Murray, "Thoughts on Sea Basing in the Twenty – First Century", Appendix D to "DSB Task Force on Sea Basing Report, 112.

[18] LCdr John Klein and Maj Rich Morales, "Sea Basing Isn't Just About the Sea", *US Naval Institiute Proceedings*, January 2004, 32 - 35.

[19] Gen Charles C Krulak, USMC. "Operational Maneuver From the Sea", *Joint Forces Quarterly,* Spring 1999, 81.

land base while rapidly building up combat power ashore for a successful amphibious operation [20].

OMFTS envisions a sea-based expeditionary force successfully compensating for the absence of permanent bases. Mobility, sustainability, rapid deployment and strategic reach are the advantages offered by sea basing a force capable of employing OMFTS. By sea basing, the logistics footprint ashore that leads to an operational pause will disappear while also enjoying greater force protection.

The US Navy has practiced sea basing in one form or another to a certain extent since World War II. Thus, the concept of sea basing is not a wholly new concept but its development in recent years has been due to the change in the global geo-strategic situation. Changes brought about in the global situation, such as the withdrawal of the US Navy from its base at Subic Bay in Phillipines, because of the end of the Cold War have resulted in new American strategies. The present concept of sea basing is a product of the strategic imperatives of power projection and forward presence, the problem of anti-access and area denial and the concept of OMFTS and STOM. It is a means by which the US Navy will remain relevant in the future.

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[20] Ibid, 82

SEA BASING – ITS CURRENT AND FUTURE FORM

The CONOPS of Sea Basing is relatively new and is still in the draft stage. Therefore, the large number of discussions that the concept has generated has prevented it from crystallizing to a clear form. The Defense Science Board's Task Force on Sea Basing provides a relatively unambiguous form but the follow up action taken by the government remains to be seen. The concept is expected to mature with the capabilities and requirements in the sea base being clearly defined before measures are taken to transform the concept into reality. The current form of the concept is examined in the succeeding paragraphs.
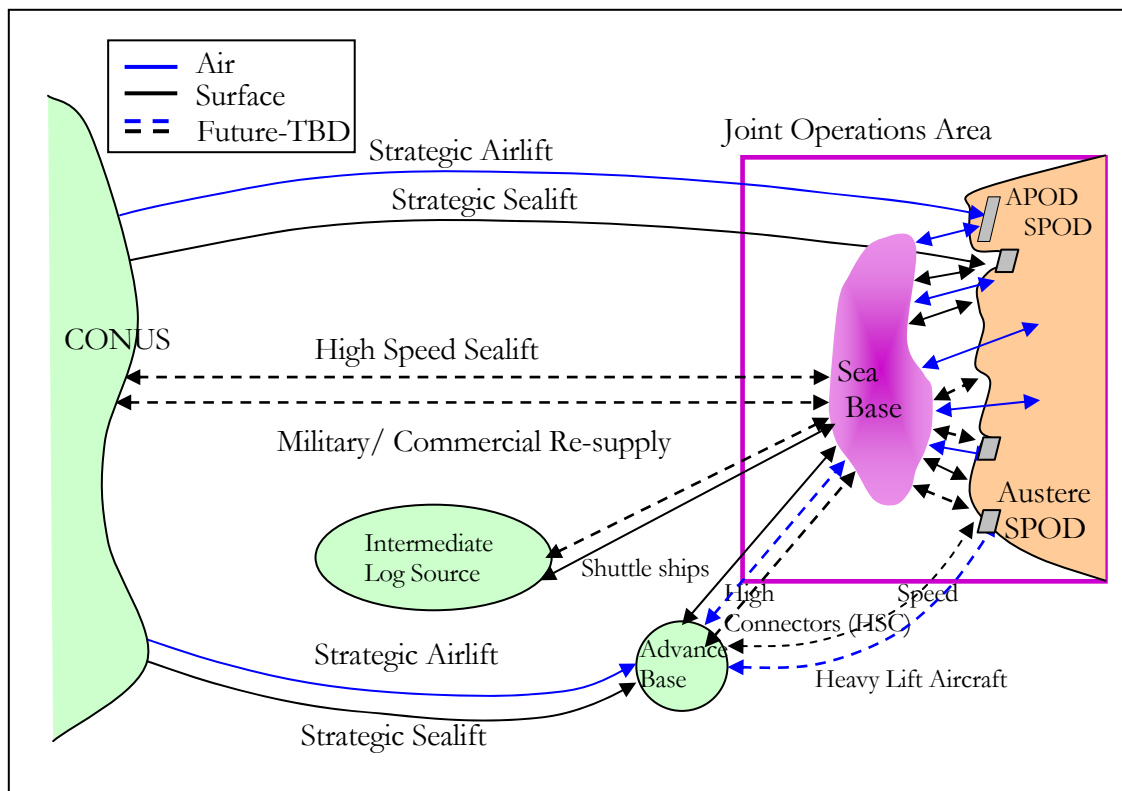
Figure 1. An overview of sea basing architecture used for analysis and development of Sea Basing CONOPS.
Source: Presentation to USMC CSC by Col John Pross, USMC on 10 March 04. (Used with his permission.)

The Naval Transformation Roadmap of 2003 defines seabasing as "a national capability, is the overarching transformational operating concept for projecting and sustaining naval power and joint forces, which assures joint access by leveraging the operational maneuver of sovereign, distributed and networked forces operating globally from the sea."[21] It distinguishes between seabasing and "The Sea Base" by stressing that seabasing is a concept while sea base is a concrete object. The sea base is defined as, "an inherently maneuverable, scalable aggregation of distributed, networked platforms that enable the global power projection of offensive and defensive forces from the sea and includes the ability to assemble, equip, project, support and sustain those forces without reliance on land bases within the Joint Operations Area." [22]

As per the current CNO of the US Navy, Sea strike, Sea Shield and Sea Basing form the three legs of the US Navy's Sea Power 21 strategy and these will be enabled by ForceNet. While Sea Strike is about offensive operations and Sea Shield about Defensive Operations, Sea Basing is the foundation from which Sea Shield and Sea Strike will be made into reality.[23] Sea Basing will provide global command and control and enable logistical support to be extended to other services by increasing afloat positioning of joint assets. These assets placed afloat will include firepower and maneuver forces.[24] Sea basing

[21] "Naval Transformation Roadmap 2003", online edition, URL: < //http.www.oft.osd.mil/library /library_ files/document_358_NTR_Final_2003.pdf> accessed 24 March 04.

[22] Ibid

[23] Adm Clark, 32 – 41.

[24] Klein and Morales, 32 – 35.

will thus enable immediate employment of forces by pre-positioning warfighting capabilities afloat.

Capabilities of a Sea Base

The "networked and dispersed" sea base is visualized by the current CNO to comprise a number of platforms spread around the globe. These platforms will include nuclear-powered carriers, multi - mission destroyers, submarines with Special Forces and most importantly for sea basing, maritime pre-positioned ships.[25] The sea base will give the capability to project offensive and defensive power from the sea. Sea bases will support the concept of OMFTS by allowing quick build up of forces ashore. Sea basing will enable ship to - objective movement by eliminating the logistical build up that enforces operational pauses through a slow down of amphibious operations tempo.

Sustainability will be one of the significant features of a sea base. It will have to be capable of sustaining operations ashore by carrying out repairs to damaged equipment and sending it ashore. In addition, it should have the capability to offload MPF ships and selectively send equipment required ashore. The Marine Corps' concept of fighting by combined arms including aviation means that the sea base should be capable of sustaining air operations in support of the operations ashore. The sea base will also permit rapid reconstitution and redeployment of forces.

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[25] Adm Clark, 32 – 41.

Results of Studies

The different capabilities necessary in a sea base have led a number of agencies carrying out assessments whether the required features are available in any of the present ships or models. The DSB Task Force has examined the concept as a whole while other organizations have dealt with some part of the problem. Here, we will limit our discussion to the study by the Office of Naval Research (ONR) and the DSB Task Force.
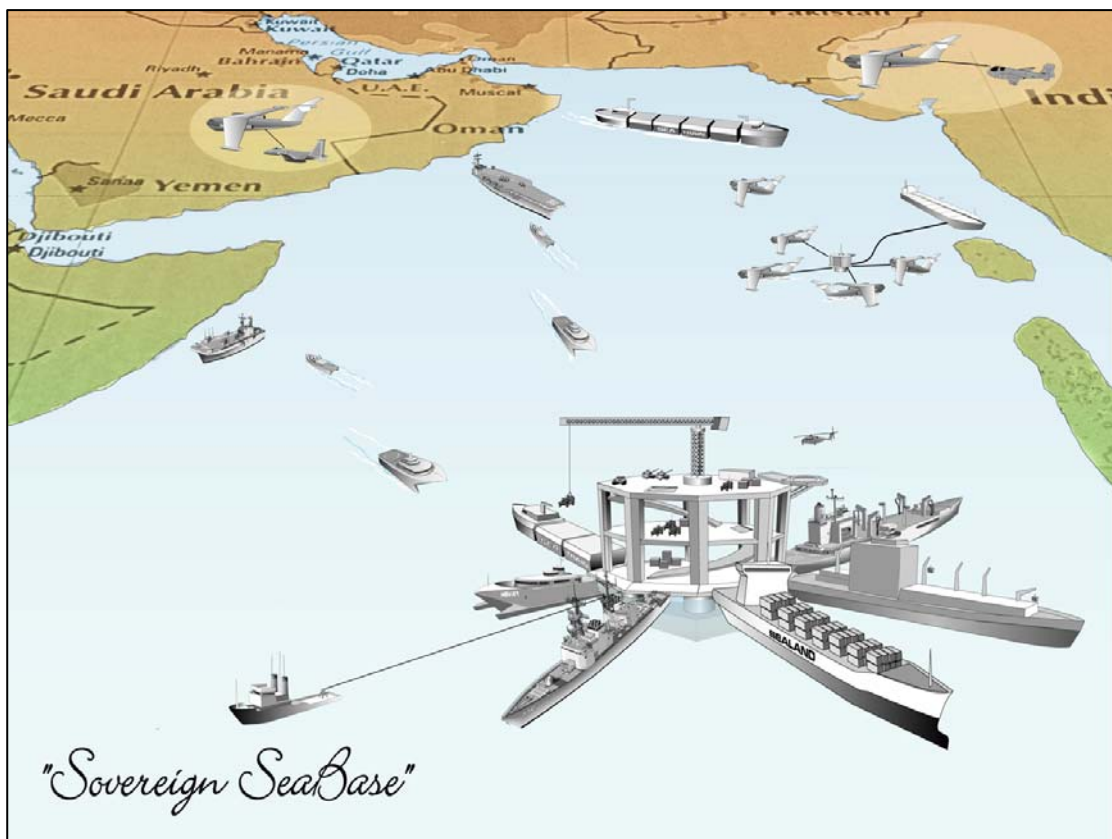
Figure 2. This picture displays a hub and spoke concept of sea base but lacks maneuverability.
Source: Office of Naval Research.

Examining the requirement of the sea base to operate as a "floating warehouse", the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) concluded that present day support ships are not

configured for that role.[26] The idea of large Mobile Offshore Bases (MOB) was conceived to cater to the prerequisite of a sea base to sustain operations of a large force for a long duration. The MOB is a conceptual modular-floating base capable of being deployed to areas of interest to provide flight, maintenance, supply and other forward logistics support operations. [27]The modules are envisioned as semi-submersibles with the ability to launch several serially aligned modules to create a 6,000 feet long runway. In addition, the MOB is also required to have a large volume for storage of equipment and liquids, able to withstand heavy seas and transfer cargo in such seas and support up to a brigade of personnel. [28] Mobility is also one of the main requirements of a MOB. The Office of Naval Research (ONR) carried out the study and is awaiting the decision on the utility of MOB. [29] However, the analysis carried out by FAS has indicated that the full range of logistical support can be provided from large conventional ships without the need for MOB. [30]

Defense Science Board Task Force on Sea Basing

The Defense Science Board Task Force established to assess how sea basing of expeditionary forces can serve the needs of the US, assumed sea basing to be a future

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[26] "Sea base", FAS Military Analysis Network, URL<:http://fas.org/man/dod-101/sys/ships/seabase.htm > accessed on 12 March 2004

[27] "What is a MOB?" *Naval Facilities Engineering Service Center* official website, URL: <http://mob.nfesc. navy.mil /default.html> accessed on 25 February 2004.

[28] Ibid.

[29] "Sea base", FAS Military Analysis Network.

[30] Ibid.

capability for the purpose of its report.[31] In addition to the ships, the Task Force envisioned the sea base to include operational concepts such as OMFTS and STOM, weapon and surveillance systems, ships, aircraft, logistics, information systems, cargo handling and transportation networks. It thus combined the "sea basing concept" and the "sea base" as defined by the Naval Transformation Roadmap.

The ship component is expected to comprise an Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG), a Carrier Strike Group (CSG) and a Maritime Propositioning Group (MPG) supported by a Combat Logistics Force (CLF). The CSG will consist of an aircraft carrier, a cruiser (CG), two guided-missile destroyers (DDG), an attack submarine (SSN) and a fast combat support ship (T-AOE).[32] It will provide deep strike combat air support to forces ashore and protection from airborne threats. It will also provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). The land assault capability of the sea base will be in the ESG, which will comprise a standard three-ship Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), a CG, two DDG, an SSN and in the future a new generation of destroyer. The MPG will provide operational reinforcement and sustained endurance in the form of combat equipment for the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) that reinforces the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) based on the ESG. The concept of reinforcements to cater to requirements ashore is an integral part of sea basing and makes the sea base scalable. With the present transportation

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[31] The Task Force was established at the request of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Technology and Logistics. The Report was submitted by the Task Force in August 2003 and can be accessed on line at <http://acq.osd.mil/dsb/seabasing.pdf>

[32] "Naval Operating Concept for Joint Operations", online edition, URL: <http://www. nwdc.navy. mil/Concepts/NOC.pdf >, accessed 25 March 2004.

capabilities, a sea base will require an advance base within 2,000 miles for support and sustainment. However, as the lift capabilities improve, the Task Force expects that sea bases in any part of the globe can be supported directly from CONUS. The capability of increasing the forces in theater through the sea base imposes the obligation for the sea base to be capable of intra - base and ship - to - base transfer of material using lighters. In deference to current doctrine, the sea base is expected to be capable of supporting joint operations.

The Task Force identified the following as the critical capabilities of sea base: -[33]

— Fully joint capable.

— Maneuverable, dispersed – able to coalesce rapidly as needed.

— Integrated command and control.

— At-sea arrival, assembly and transfer of materiel and personnel.

— Selective, robust offload. Robust in challenging seas.

— Conduct and sustain forcible entry and subsequent operations.

— Facilitate movement ashore.

— Force protection.

— Re-suppliable throughout the follow-on force build up period in adverse weather.

— Ability to reconstitute and redeploy the force.

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[33] DSB Report, 36.

Figure 3. This picture appeared on the cover of *Popular Mechanics* magazine (April 2003). The DSB Task Force specifically pointed out this picture saying that this is not a sea base.

Although the CONOPS predicted sea base ships to move to a distance of 25 nautical miles (nm) from the shore at the outset of conflict, current thinking suggests that the sea base may need to be able to project ground power ashore from beyond 25 miles offshore, and should be capable to do so as far away as 100 miles from the shore.[34] The concept depends upon the design of future systems such as Hybrid Ultra Large Aircraft (HULA), the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle (EFV), the re-designed Landing Ship, Helicopter Assault (LHA(R)) and MPF ship (MPF(F)). Unlike the study sponsored by FAS that rejected the idea of MOB, the Task Force report considers the

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[34] MGen JR Battaglini, USMC, presentation to USMC CSC on 17 Mar 04. (Approval to quote obtained on email by author and mentors.)

development of MOB as a viable option provided current drawbacks of its low transit speed and high cost are overcome. It also discusses the idea of a large semi-submersible platform with its advantages of stability in high seas, large cargo handling capacity, high deployment speed and artificial lees available for lighterage operations as an alternative.

Sea Basing in the Future

Sea Basing as a concept is bound to develop further and take a more concrete form. At the very least, it will involve the presence of a large number of US ships in various parts of the world. These forward-deployed ships will give the capability for the US to immediately deploy its forces in any region of the world. Sea basing will give the capability to deploy personnel up to brigade strength according to the magnitude of the crisis. It will also speed up the tempo of operations ashore, give the US the capability to sustain operations for a longer duration than present and permit re-constitution and re-deployment of forces. The shortcoming of sea basing is that it will not be able to support a full combat operation of the magnitude of Operation Iraqi Freedom without host nation support.

Yet, the current capabilities of ships and aircraft are inadequate to meet the demands of sea basing. Future designs will have to cater for these requirements. Mobile Offshore Bases or semi-submersible platforms may be an integral part of the sea base. However, these concepts will have to further develop before they can turn into reality. Sea Basing is an incremental concept and it does not appear to have any fixed deadlines as of

now. Considering the current capabilities vis-à-vis the future capabilities, the concept will take at least fifteen more years to mature into a full-fledged system.

Figure 4. This is a futuristic graphic representation of a sea base that more closely represents the description of a sea base as compared to others. Much of the things portrayed here don't exist but represent capabilities desired in a sea base.

Source: Presentation to USMC CSC by Col John Pross, USMC on 10 March 04. (Used with his permission.)

IMPLICATIONS OF SEA BASING

The strategic interest of the US is implicit in the concept of sea basing. One of the rationales for sea basing is the importance of having the capability to deploy force in any region of the world in the shortest possible time. The ability of the US to carry out unilateral action in its area of interest is one of the current issues in international politics

because of the US action in Iraq. However, it is not clear, whether the probable impact of sea basing on the relations between the US and other countries has been studied and, if so, in what depth. The issue has been addressed briefly in an article in *Proceedings*, but its affect at the governmental level is uncertain.[35] Sea basing brings to the fore several issues in the realm of international relations, some of which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Use of High Seas

International law guarantees the complete freedom of movement and operation to all ships and aircraft, including warships and military aircraft on and over the High Seas. All countries enjoy equal right to use the high seas for their purposes. The law also guarantees the right of sovereignty of warships and allows them to take measures to protect themselves. Sea basing will lead to an increase in the semi-permanent presence of US warships in larger numbers in all parts of the globe. If the concept of MOB or semi-submersible platforms turns into reality, the oceans of the world will see these platforms also floating on it. The sovereignty of these platforms would undisputedly rest with the country of its origin – the US. While the idea of "a piece of Americana floating on the waves" seems to be attractive to the US, other countries of the world may not share the enthusiasm. An increase in the naval activity of the US would result in the US Navy exerting greater control over the area around its own forces. In theory, the current capability of the US Navy allows it to control an area about 200 nm around its carrier. With

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[35] Klein and Morales, 32 – 35.

23

the expected improvements in technology and the greater stakes in terms of cost of the sea base, one can prudently assume that the radius of 200 nm will increase. The larger number of US assets at sea would result in an increase in the force protection measures. Although the oceans cover a vast area, ships – both commercial and military, do not use most of this. Even if the US Navy keeps clear of the shipping routes, the possibility that it would encounter ships of other navies in its area of operations appears great. In such cases, the probability of the occurrence of unpleasant incidents at sea, not necessarily deliberate, remains high.

Relations with Present Allies and Coalition Partners

After World War II, the US had stationed its troops around the world from where they could be immediately deployed to likely trouble spots. Today, the US has forces stationed in Japan and Korea in North East Asia, Europe and the Horn of Africa. In the Persian Gulf region, Saudi Arabia has been its traditional ally for decades. However, these traditional allies have now started wavering in their support for continued US military presence on their soil. Besides these countries, the end of the Cold War has also led to questioning the rationale for basing troops in Europe. Thus, the number of overseas bases of the US has been reduced for economic as well as political reasons.[36] The presence of overseas bases ensured the participation of allies and coalition partners. However, the shift to sea base may eliminate the need for participation of foreign troops in US-led coalitions.[37] This capability becomes more ominous in light of the US decision to bypass the wishes of

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[36] "The New Priority of the USN – Sea Basing," *AMI International Commentary.*

the United Nations and some of its close allies such as France and Germany while commencing Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003

Effect of Unilateralism

Sea basing will give the US the capability to quickly deploy its forces in any part of the globe. This would give the US the potential to act unilaterally in any crisis. Although the US would not prefer to act without allies, the very fact that it has the potential may be unnerving to many countries including its current allies.[38] The manner in which the US decided to "liberate" Iraq may justify their fears. The capabilities inherent in sea basing may reinforce the perception of the willingness of US to use pre-emptive policy without considering the views of other countries. Taking the effect of this to the extreme, one can imagine a condition in which the majority of the countries are aligned against the US instead of being aligned with the US – a wholly undesirable effect! Of course, in the present circumstances, it is highly improbable and it would not be fair to ascribe such a situation only to the US policy of sea basing. Nevertheless, the possibility will remain and increase if the US relies more on its military power vice other elements of national power.

The strategic advantages that sea basing offers the US are many and readily apparent to the proponents of sea basing. However, over-reliance on the military element of national power at the cost of the other elements has many pitfalls. It is necessary to

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[37] Klein and Morales, 32 – 35.

[38] The National Security Strategy of USA of September 2002 makes several references to the desire to include its allies in any military operation. However, the document also states the readiness of the US to take pre-emptive action without any allies if the circumstances warrant such action.

recognize the pitfalls now and start working to avoid it. One of the possible ways to do this is to study the possible diplomatic fallout of sea basing in each region. Thereafter, identify those countries that may perceive a threat because of sea basing and then engage those countries so as to convince them that they do not have anything to fear, thus turning them into potential partners who will support sea basing. This paper will deal with the possible implications of sea basing in the Indian Ocean specifically in relation to India.

SEA BASING AND FUTURE OF INDO – US RELATIONSHIP

THE INDIAN OCEAN AND UNITED STATES

Importance of the Indian Ocean

Despite being only the third largest ocean in terms of area, the Indian Ocean is the most strategic waterway of the world. The resources of the Indian Ocean that include ¾ of strategic reserves of oil, iron ore and tin have attracted global attention for a long time. Trade between the East and the West was conducted through this ocean since before the times of the Roman Empire. The importance of Eastern spices to the Europeans in the late Middle Ages spurred the Age of Discovery.[39] The shift from coal to oil as the means of propulsion of ships resulted in a change of the materiel sought from the Indian Ocean and brought greater attention to this region. The control of the major regional choke points such as the Cape of Good Hope, Suez, Bab el Mandeb, Mozambique Channel, Strait of Hormuz, Malacca Straits and Sunda Straits by any belligerent power has the potential to upset the rest of the countries of the world.

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[39] Alvin J Cottrell and Associates, *Sea Power and Strategy in the Indian Ocean,* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981), 21-23.

The Cold War Period

The protection of the Indian Ocean Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) was ensured by the greatest user power for centuries, which was for the major period Britain. The US decision to send a part of its Seventh Fleet from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean was reported in December 1963. A decision was also taken to form a separate Indian Ocean Command slightly earlier although it was subsequently revoked. The US Task Force, "Concord Squadron" entered the Indian Ocean on 5 April 1964 and comprised one aircraft carrier, four destroyers and one tanker.[40] The entry of this US Naval presence roughly coincided with the British decision in 1966 to withdraw east of Suez, thus giving up their traditional role of protecting the Indian Ocean SLOCs. The subsequent entry of the Soviet Union into the Indian Ocean in 1968 may have been a result of various factors such as the US presence, impending withdrawal of the British and the development of its own capability to maintain a naval presence there. The Soviets deployed about 15 to 20 combat ships and support vessels to establish a formidable naval presence.[41] The establishment of the US base at Diego Garcia in 1971 further indicated US interest in this region. The base, which was originally meant to be a communication facility, became fully operational in 1986 with the completion of a $500 million construction program.

US Interests in the Indian Ocean

With the end of the Cold War, the super power rivalry that necessitated the US presence in the Indian Ocean to contain communist influence from spreading in the region

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[40] K Rajendra Singh, *Politics of the Indian Ocean,*(Delhi: Thomson Press, 1974), 61.

[41] Joseph L Nogee and Robert H Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy since World War II,* (Permagon Press, 1984), 164.

is obsolete. The significance of the Indian Ocean for the US now stems from the economic fact that approximately 30% of the oil supplies of the US comes from the Persian Gulf. Additionally, being the world's sole superpower, quick deployment capability to a region of crisis is a strategic imperative for the US. The geo - political environment of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region makes it a volatile region. The 1990s saw US involvement in Kuwait / Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan in this region. Illegal drug trafficking through the "Golden Triangle" and the "Golden Crescent" coupled with the spread of terrorism is another problem prevalent in the region that can upset peace in other regions of the world. Due to the high economic stakes of the US, Japan and many European countries, it is of paramount importance that a conflict that interferes with the smooth conduct of sea-based commerce in this region is controlled at the earliest. Factors such as current instability, expected economic progress, the scarce natural resources and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) may lead to greater insecurity in the future.[42] The US thus sees its presence in this region as peacetime deterrence necessitated by the inability of the IOR littorals to ensure the safety and stability in this region.[43]

US Presence in the Indian Ocean

The US base in Diego Garcia has increased its capability over the years since its initial establishment as a naval communication facility. It is now capable of launching B –

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[42] Gen Krulak, 78-79.

[43] Cdr Charles D Schwalier, USN, *US Naval Presence in the Indian Ocean*: *A Credible Deterrent*. Research Report, Maxwell Air Force Base: Air War College, May 1987, 44.

52 bombers, AWACS command and control aircraft and various transport aircraft, has a harbor that accommodates warships and nuclear submarines in addition to its upgraded communication and computer station. Ships of the Navy's Maritime Prepositioning Squadron Two are also based there in addition to an unit of the Military Sealift Command. The island also hosts a Maritime Patrol Squadron that operates P-3 Orions and the Ground Based Deep Space Surveillance Site (GEODSS).[44]

The Fifth Fleet was reestablished on 01 July 1995 and is tasked with operations in the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, the Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. Its Area of Responsibility (AOR) includes the Suez Canal, the Strait of Hormuz and Strait of Bab el Mandeb. It is the naval component of the Central Command and has its headquarters in Bahrain. On an average, the Fifth Fleet consists of 25 ships and 15,000 sailors and Marines.[45] The present location of the US forces in the Indian Ocean makes it possible for forward deployed US forces to reach virtually any region of interest in the Indian Ocean within 96 hours.

The movement of the US Navy - Marine Corps team towards sea basing has already commenced although it will take some time before it reaches its full potential. Considering the current and future importance of the Indian Ocean to US strategy, it would

[44]Rahul Roy-Chaudhary, *India's Maritime Security,* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2000), 110-112.

[45] Web page of the COMUSNAVCENT online
URL:<http://www.cusnc.navy.mil/pages/history_navcent.htm> accessed on 28 March 28, 2004.

be prudent to assume that the northern Indian Ocean would be one likely area for the location of a sea base. In fact the DSB Task Force Report takes into consideration the sea state found in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea to determine the sea state that the sea base should be able to handle heavy loads in.[46]. Thus, it is evident that the US sees its presence in the Indian Ocean to be legitimate and altruistic – reasons strong enough to continue the presence in the foreseeable future. The forward presence of the US is likely to be intensified by sea basing in this region.

INDIA'S ROLE IN INDIAN OCEAN

India's Maritime Tradition

India's maritime tradition stretches back over 4000 years. It has been carrying out sea borne trade with other countries since the time of Indus Valley civilization that flourished from 3000 BC to 1500 BC. The remnants of a large dock believed to have been built in 2300 BC were excavated in Lothal in the state of Gujrat in western India. The army of Alexander the Great returned to Mesopotamia in ships built in Sind in present day Pakistan. Even before Alexander, there were references to India in Greek works. On the east, the Bay of Bengal was busy with naval and maritime activities from the first-century AD onwards. The people of Kalinga (modern state of Orissa on the East Coast of India) are believed to have reached Java in 75 AD. [47] Trading ships from India dominated the Indian Ocean while freely sharing it with Chinese and Arab participants. This trade was the source

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[46] DSB Task Force, 40.

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of a vibrant and largely pacific interaction within the Indian Ocean and did not require the protection of a strong naval force. Even so, the Chola Dynasty, which dominated the Southern part of India from 9th Century to the 12th Century, felt the need to have a strong naval force to protect its trading interests. The decline of India's maritime power commenced in the 13th Century although Indian interests were preponderant in the Indian Ocean till the 16th Century. The lack of naval power enabled the European powers, starting with the Portuguese, to make easy inroads into India and culminated in British rule over India for about 200 years.

The Indian Navy has its roots in the East India Company's Marine established in 1612. Over the years, it metamorphosed into the Royal Indian Navy, the immediate precursor of the Indian Navy. The Royal Indian Navy was used as a coastal navy while the umbrella of the Royal Navy exerted control of the sea thus protecting the maritime trade between Britain and India. India became a Republic on 26 January 1950 and with that, the prefix 'Royal' was dropped.

Naval Strategy

Although the Indian Navy predates independence, the Indian government has not developed any document laying down its maritime strategy even 55 years after independence.[48] The landward focus of India's military strategy post independence can be attributed to its longer land frontier of about 9000 miles compared to the coastline of about

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[47] Rajendra Singh, 3.

4200 miles. The tension along its border with Pakistan has influenced this attitude to a great degree. Although the strength of the Indian Army and Navy has grown five-fold since independence, this seeming parity is inadequate in view of the increased responsibilities of the navy in terms of maritime trade, EEZ and offshore economic interests – a fact ignored by successive governments.[49] Thus, the maritime aspect of India's security had played a secondary role despite the fact that over the centuries, invaders who came from the land settled down and influenced or adopted the Indian culture. In contrast, those who came from the sea, primarily the Europeans, ruled over the India as masters and exploited the wealth of the country for the commercial interests of their home country.

Limiting our discussion to the naval aspect of India's maritime strategy, the first Strategic Defense Review of the Indian Navy provides a good starting point. This document, released in May 1998, identifies four roles for the Indian Navy– sea-based deterrence, economic and energy security, forward presence and naval diplomacy.[50] The deterrent effort of the Indian Navy will be against a naval challenge by any littoral nation or a combination of littoral nations of the Indian Ocean Region. It will also aim to prevent intervention by extra-regional powers. In tandem with India's minimum nuclear deterrent desire, a sea-based nuclear deterrence capability is also expected to be a role although not

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[48] The Ocean Policy Statement of 1982 falls woefully short of being called a maritime strategy.

[49] The strength of the Indian Army and navy in 1947 was about 230,000 and 11,000 respectively as against the current strength of 1.1 million and 55,000 respectively. (Source: GHQ India to War Office, London letters of 5 July and 30 July 1947, National Army Museum, Chelsea, London, Indian Navy's official website URL: <http://indiannavy.nic.in> accessed on 16 April 04 and *The Military Balance 2003-04* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003)).

[50]Roy-Chaudhary, 125.

identified as such in the SDR.[51]   95% of India's trade is carried out through the sea. Therefore, ensuring energy security will remain a primary concern. With the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) scheduled to increase from the current 2.02 million sq. km to 3.3 million sq km in 2004, the protection of the EEZ will be an important task. Towards this end, the Indian Navy would like to have the capability to carry out surveillance over its EEZ and send such force as required to "escort, support or rush to the assistance of commercial and energy assets in distress."[52] The document makes a distinction between power projection and forward presence and advocates the ability to be present in areas of interest. The capability of naval diplomacy to support national diplomatic initiatives has been recognized. Although the term "blue water navy" has been avoided, the potential of the Indian Navy to operate as a blue water navy is generally recognized by the rest of the world. [53] The possible acquisition of a nuclear powered submarine will help the Indian Navy take the crucial leap from a "low-grade blue-water" force to a "full-fledged blue-water" capability.[54]

The SDR of May 1998 shows where the Indian Navy would like itself to be a few years from now. Therefore, it is necessary to confirm whether it is indeed "on track". A

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[51] Writing in Jul 2000 for Jane's Special Report on "Indian Defense and Security – Industry, Forces and Future Trends", Dr WPS Sidhu, Dr Chris Smith and Thomas Withington have commented on the Indian Navy's keenness to acquire a nuclear deterrent. Online edition, URL: <http://www4.janes.com/K2/ doc.jsp? T=Q&K2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/srep/srep068/>, accessed 09 February 2004.

[52] "Indian Navy, Strategic Defense Review: The Maritime Dimension – A Naval Vision", May 1998, 34, originally quoted in Rahul Roy-Chaudhary, *India's Maritime Security,* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2000), 125.

[53] Leadmark The Canadian Navy's Strategy for 2020, *Future Naval Assessment,* accessed online at URL:<http://www.navy.dnd.ca/leadmark/doc/appendix_D_e.asp> accessed on 09 February 2004.

[54] Roy-Chaudhary, 126.

review of the Indian Navy's combat experience until now would give the correct background for this audit.

Indian Navy's Combat Experience

In comparison to other navies, the Indian Navy has not had much combat experience at the present date. Naval ships participated in the Liberation of Goa in 1961 and sank the Portuguese frigate *Afonso de Albuquerque* besides capturing the island of Anjadip by a naval landing party. Of the three wars plus one limited conflict with Pakistan and one war with China since independence, the Indian Navy played a positive role only in the 1971 war. In this war, naval ships carried out missile attacks on the port of Karachi and aircraft from the carrier *INS Vikrant* attacked the ports of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar in East Pakistan. Besides this, the navy successfully blockaded both West and East Pakistan. During the Indian Peace Keeping Operations in Sri Lanka from 1987 to 1990, naval ships transported the army units to and from Sri Lanka and have been patrolling the Palk Straits separating the two countries to prevent Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) activities[55]. In 1988, the Indian government responding to a call for help from the government of Maldives diverted two warships operating in the region and they successfully prosecuted the mercenaries who had attempted to overthrow the Maldivian government. For just over two years from December 1992, a task force of up to three ships (a corvette, a Landing Ship Tank (LST) and a tanker) provided humanitarian aid to

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[55] The LTTE is an organization that has been spearheading the militant struggle of the Tamilian people of Indian origin demanding greater autonomy from the federal government of Sri Lanka.

Mogadishu from Mombassa.[56] During the Kargil conflict of 1999, the navy was poised to blockade Karachi again. The effect this had on keeping the conflict limited and ending it is not clear at this juncture.

Although the Indian Navy's contribution in 1971 operations pales in significance to the Indian army or the Indian Air Force, the dispatch of the *USS Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal indicated the possibility of the enlargement of the essentially regional conflict. The movement of the carrier was ordered ostensibly for the evacuation of Americans from East Pakistan. Nevertheless, this act, as intended by the US, was perceived as an attempt at gunboat diplomacy.[57] Consequently, this incident significantly contributed towards the Indian government supporting the UN declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace.

Self–portrait of the Indian Navy

The Indian Navy sees itself as a competent, confident, operationally viable and regionally visible maritime power. As stated by Rear Admiral Raja Menon (Retd) in a seminar on "Maritime Dimensions of India's Security" in January 2001, the Indian Navy is one of the few navies actually growing in strength and capability.[58] With strength of about 55,000 personnel, the Indian Navy has a government sanctioned force level of fifty-four principal combatants. As against this, the actual number of such ships is projected to settle at thirty-three in 2010. [59] The Indian Navy acquired its first aircraft carrier and submarine

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[56] Roy-Chaudhary, 181.

[57] Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years*, (Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 905.

[58] "Maritime Dimensions of India's Security"*, Strategic Affairs* Apr 2001, online edition. URL: <http://www. stratmag.com/issueApr-1/page06.htm> accessed on 09 February 2004.

[59] Roy-Chaudhary, 128 -130.

in the 1960s and since then, has operated as a three-dimensional navy. It has been exercising in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal for many decades. It also operates in the northern Indian Ocean. In a recent change in operational philosophy, the Indian Navy has started looking outwards and expanding its reach. It has shed its isolationism and started participating in various multi-lateral exercises with regional and extra-regional navies including the US Navy.

The Indian Navy is expected to become capable of medium power projection between 2015 and 2020.[60] Professor Thomas PM Barnett of the US Naval War College has suggested a 12-step program for the Indian Navy to achieve this transformation. The steps entail a basic change in mind-set. One of the important changes in thinking will be to expand the Indian Navy's interpretation of the role of the navies in regional and international security while another is to turn the navy's operational focus towards influencing events on land. The navy also needs to "build relationships of trust with its smaller neighbors over time" and build a good relationship with the US Navy. [61]

Considering the steps outlined by Professor Barnett in 2001 and seeing the present actions taken by the Indian Navy, one may conclude that the Indian Navy is truly headed in the right direction to reach its full potential. The "medium power projection" capability that the Indian Navy is expected to achieve is usually understood to mean "capable of

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[60] Leadmark Strategy 2020.

[61] Thomas PM Barnett, "India's 12 Steps to a World-Class Navy", *US Naval Institute Proceedings,* July 2001, 41-45.

projecting power in the Indian Ocean". Therefore, it is necessary to delve into the reason behind its interest in the Indian Ocean.

Importance of the Indian Ocean to the Indian Navy

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is the largest geo-strategic region of the world. The unique position of India astride the major SLOCs passing through this region makes India an important player in this part of the world, as the Indian Ocean is literally the backyard of the Indian Navy. Besides its position, the sheer size of India in this region along with the other accoutrements of power, give it a major role in the regional security environment. It should also be able to counteract and deal with threats to smaller countries of the region. [62] The prompt action by the Indian Navy during the attempted coup in Maldives in November 1988 resulting in the capture of the mercenaries illustrates the kind of role India can play in this region.

Ninety-five percent of India's trade passes through this ocean. India's large coastline has endowed her with an EEZ that is almost as large as her land area. A pioneer state in seabed mining, India has been provided with an area of 150,000 sq. km in the central Indian Ocean by the International Seabed Authority (ISBA) for deep seabed mining.[63] India thus has a legitimate economic interest in the Indian Ocean. However, India's interest in stability and peace in the IOR is not only due to the benefits for its own security. Stability and peace in the IOR will contribute to the economic and political

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[62] "Maritime Dimensions of India's Security", *Strategic Affairs* Apr 2001 online edition.

[63] Roy-Chaudhary, 50.

development of the littoral states. However, with a history of maritime disputes and claims, the Indian Ocean region is not free from the risk of conflict. The inherent mobility of naval forces makes it imperative for India to also consider developments in the southern approaches to the Indian Ocean. The dispatch of Task Force 74 with USS Enterprise to the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 Indo - Pakistan War served to highlight the importance of the sea as a route for a potential enemy. In the background of India's subjugation by maritime powers, the effect it had on the Indian national psyche should be understandable.

The realization that the presence of extra-regional powers in the Indian Ocean would lead to militarization of this zone because of the Cold War led to a demand for declaring the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace. This was originally mooted by Sri Lanka in 1964 and was adopted by the United Nations in 1971. However, attempts to keep the zone demilitarized and free of extra regional powers did not succeed due to the opposition of the US, UK and France. US actions such as establishment of a naval base at Diego Garcia, basing of the Fifth Fleet at Bahrain and frequent deployment of ships from the Seventh Fleet in the Indian Ocean have therefore been looked at with suspicion by the Indian government and the Indian Navy. Ideally, the Indian Navy along with the navies of other littoral nations of the IOR should ensure the safety of commerce in this region. Nevertheless, because of the high stakes of extra-regional nations, it is almost impossible to keep their navies out of the Indian Ocean. So India is now veering to accept the presence of

extra-regional navies in the Indian Ocean and is prepared to work in step with them to ensure the safety of commerce and shipping in the IOR.

INDO - US RELATIONSHIP – A BRIEF DISCUSSION

Background

The relations between India and the US were affected to a large extent by the politics of the Cold War. India's independence in 1947 from the United Kingdom coincided with the adoption of the US strategy of containment. India opted to stay equidistant from the two power blocks and was the leader of the non-aligned movement. However, the US saw an Indian tilt towards the Soviet bloc and indeed this perception affected the relations between the two countries till the end of the Cold War.

Present Relationship

The liberalization of India's economy in 1991 coincided with the end of the Cold War and led the US government to re-examine relations with India. India on her part also decided to adopt a different attitude in light of the changed circumstances due to the demise of the Soviet Union. The result was a new relationship between the two countries. The new relation between India and the US has survived the trough of India's nuclear tests in 1998 and today the two countries are having closer cooperation than ever in a number of fields.

Opportunities for the Future

With one of the strongest militaries in the region, an economy that is growing robustly, its role in the world arena as a leader of the Third World and its commitment to democracy, India is an attractive strategic partner for the US. "We have a common interest in the free flow of commerce, including through the vital sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean. Finally, we share an interest in fighting terrorism and in creating a strategically stable Asia."[64]

The China factor is also an important component of the relations that the two nations can build. The US expectations from India are ensuring non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, cooperation in the war against terrorism, cooperation in ensuring energy security, regional security in the backdrop of Chinese growth and military cooperation.[65] The US also expects India to contribute towards peacekeeping operations – a role India has been carrying out under the auspices of the United Nations. Table 1 lists the specific US interests in military cooperation. It is apparent that the table does not take into account the effect of sea basing.

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[64] "US National Security Strategy, September 2002", 27.

[65] Brian P Goldschimdt, *Making a US – India Strategic Partnership Work,* Master's Thesis, (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, December 01), 48-49.

Table 1. Summary of U.S. desires for Military Cooperation.

Desire	Service	Remarks
Underway Replenishment	USN	The USN would like support from Indian Naval tankers while operating in the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea.
Naval Escorts	USN	The USN would like IN ships to provide escort services through the Malacca Straits.
Indian Naval Task Force	USN	Support of USN combat operations in the region, either as independent Task Force or Combined USN-IN Task Force.
Repair Facilities	USN	The USN would like to use Indian naval repair facilities in order to avoid maintain forces closer to the region.
Port Facilities	USN	The USN would like to make port calls in India (similar to Australian visits) for liberty as well as logistical support.
Fuel Services	All	The United States would like to use airfields and ports for refueling services.
Training Facilities	All	The United States would like to use Indian training facilities as well as participate in training operations with Indian forces.
Staging Facilities	All	The United States would like to be able to use Indian airfields and bases for staging forward deployed troops during combat operations.

Source: Brian P Goldschimdt, *Making a US – India Strategic Partnership Work,* Master's Thesis, (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, December 01), 50.

The Indian expectations from a partnership with the US include help in combating terrorism, lifting of technical sanctions against dual-use technology aimed against its indigenous missile development program and space program, help in civilian nuclear technology as well as nuclear stability in South Asia and military assistance.[66] It would seem that both the US and India have almost the same expectations from each other and with the declaration of 13 January 2004 regarding cooperation in the fields of civilian nuclear and space technologies and high technology trade, the two countries have indeed

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[66] Goldschimdt, 31 - 40.

moved closer towards realizing their expectation from each other. Yet, both countries also have some concerns with each other.

Possible Shortcomings

India has been following an independent foreign policy since her independence. This was one of the factors that had soured the relationship between the two countries during the Cold War. An examination of India's recent foreign policy indicates that it is gradually moving away from its traditional position of idealism towards pragmatism. India's support for President Bush's proposal for ballistic missile defense capability is an indicator of this change. Yet, India refused to send troops to Iraq for peacekeeping operations during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Initially it refused to do so on the grounds of lack of UN involvement. Subsequently, the ongoing insurgencies in the country that have already over stretched the army were cited as the reason for India's inability to contribute. The professed reasons notwithstanding, the public opinion at home may have been the actual reason for India's refusal to contribute troops. The effect of public opinion on the functioning of the government was also evident during Desert Storm when permission was given for US aircraft to refuel in India but withdrawn a few days later after a public outcry. The Pakistan factor in a new relationship with India is another impediment where the US has to tread cautiously.

For India to shed its distrust for the US and move towards closer relationship with it is an equally demanding task. The point that Indian foreign policy interests may not match

with those of the US and in such cases the US will take action as it considers essential without regarding India's views has been driven home on more than one occasion. Apart from Operation Iraqi Freedom, the most recent example was the declaration granting "Non-NATO ally" status to Pakistan without taking India into confidence. The US-led attack on the Taliban government in Afghanistan was supported by India. However, it has highlighted the US willingness to act in India's traditional spheres of influence. It is therefore clear that although a beginning has been made to move away from the old relationship and build a new mutually beneficial relationship, the two countries need more time to strengthen this relationship.

Taking the Relationship Forward

The convergence of interests in a number of fields between India and the US and the similar expectations that each has from the other will help keep their relations on an even keel and result in a further improvement of the relationship. Sea basing will give the US the capability to act unilaterally. However, it is apparent that the US would like to act in conjunction with its allies instead of acting alone.[67] With the almost certainty of the northern Indian Ocean being an area used for sea basing in the future, the US Navy and the Indian Navy will operate in virtually the same area. The status of the relationship between the two countries will dictate how these two navies will view each other. It is therefore necessary to chart a course to ensure that they have cooperation between each other vice confrontation or even co-existence.

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[67] "US National Security Strategy".

CONCLUSION

The possibility of sea basing in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea raises questions whether India and its navy have anything to fear. Sea basing of the US Navy will result in a far greater movement of its ships in these areas that have been the traditional area of operation of the Indian Navy. One may argue that the increased presence of US ships and aircraft will result in virtually imposing restrictions on the operations of the Indian Navy. If the Indian Navy does not honor the restrictions, intentionally or otherwise, it may result in some ugly incidents at sea. These could range from buzzing of ships by aircraft and interfering in the conduct of each other's exercises at sea at the lower end to firing at each other's ships or aircraft at the higher end. This possibility makes the issue of trust and confidence between the navies more pertinent and this can be ensured by conducting joint naval exercises.

Naval exercises between two states in the process of establishing a strategic relationship have a greater significance than between two friendly states. Naval cooperation can cover a broad spectrum of activities. While personnel exchanges, ship visits and attendance at fleet reviews are at the lower end of the spectrum, activities like information and intelligence exchanges, coordinated patrols and maritime surveillance may be some of the activities at the higher end. The change in US military's strategy from threat based to capability-based model requires the US military to have a stronger network of allies and

friends.[68] Interoperability with other navies is desired by the US and is to be achieved through doctrinal and technological development, combined training events and exercises.[69] The Indian Navy's outward looking philosophy indicates its readiness to form closer relations with other navies. Following the first exercise between the US Navy and the Indian Navy in 1992, exercises have been conducted at regular intervals, the latest being in Sep 03. The degree of complexity has been steadily increasing with each exercise. Besides the exercises, Indian warships were deployed to protect American merchantmen transiting the Malacca Straits in 2002.

Considering the strategic relationship that both countries are keen on developing, the US Navy's sea basing may politically be a better option than basing some troops in India. Permanent basing of US troops on its soil is not likely to be permitted in the foreseeable future because of the Indian experience of British colonialism that started in a similar way. The large cultural difference between the US and India is another major factor that works against basing US troops in India. However, the opening of some of its bases and ports to US ships and aircraft for refueling and other needs may be politically viable and can be in consonance with sea basing.

Recommendation

The Indian Navy's capability to evolve as a navy capable of medium power projection in the Indian Ocean makes it a worthy partner for the US Navy. A relationship

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[68]Goldschmidt, 53.

[69]"National Military Strategy, 1997".

aimed at interoperability between the two navies would be in harmony with the budding strategic relationship of the two countries. Although navies are inherently more capable of interoperability than armies or air forces, the vast differences in technology, weaponry and doctrine between the US and the Indian navies demand a slow and sure process to achieve the desired level of interoperability. Therefore the way ahead is to continue exercising together, build mutual trust and confidence and enhance the level of cooperation by intelligence sharing and exchange. Combined SLOC protection and signing of agreement for avoidance of Incidents at Sea would be more steps to achieve the aim. The period from now until the sea basing concept comes of age should be utilized to build this mutually beneficial relationship between the navies that will be in tandem with the overall relationship between the two countries.

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